

Some Snakes from Nepal¹

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Data on 103 specimens representing 29 species of snakes from Nepal are given. These snakes were collected in central and eastern Nepal at altitudes ranging from 100 m to 2470 m. Twelve species of snakes reported from Nepal for the first time are: *Dendrelaphis tristis*, *Elaphe helena*, *Boiga cyanea*, *Boiga forsteni*, *Enhydris enhydris*, *Enhydris sieboldi*, *Elachistodon westermanni*, *Bungarus caeruleus*, *Bungarus fasciatus*, *Naja naja*, *Ophiophagus hannah*, and *Typhlops braminus*. Early collections from Nepal lack accurate data, thus *Elaphe hodgsoni*, *Amphiesma himalayana*, *Sibynophis collaris* and *Calliophis maccllellandi* are reported from Nepal for the first time with accurate locality and altitude data. *Boiga trigonata*, *Lycodon aulicus*, *Xenochrophis piscator*, *Amphiesma stolata*, *Ptyas mucosus* and *Trimeresurus albolabris* were not previously known from the Nepal lowlands. Likewise *Amphiesma himalayana*, *A. platyceps*, *A. stolata*, *Xenochrophis piscator* and *Trimeresurus monticola* have been found for the first time in east Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Despite scattered collections made during the past 150 years, the reptile fauna of Nepal remains poorly known. An excellent summary of herpetological work done in Nepal up to 1960 was presented by Swan & Leviton (1962).

Since 1960 there has been little herpetological work done here. In the mid-1960s an enthusiastic Swiss national collected snakes as a hobby while working at the Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara. Unfortunately he was bitten by a snake (probably the Coral *Calliophis maccllellandi*) and died within the day. His fine collection, we heard, was then destroyed.

Snakes reported in this paper are from central and eastern Nepal at altitudes ranging from 100 m (305 ft.) to 2470 m (8100 ft.). Specimens are preserved in alcohol and are deposited in the various museums mentioned or in the Fleming Collection in Kathmandu. Identifications

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were made with the aid of comparative material where possible and with keys and descriptions in Smith (1943). Scientific terminology follows that of Swan & Leviton (1962).

A total of 29 species were represented in the 103 specimens examined. Of these, 12 species were new for Nepal, so the known snake fauna of Nepal now comprises 45 species. We have located nine species of poisonous snakes in Nepal; three of them are from the Kathmandu Valley.

ACCOUNT OF SPECIES

BOIDAE

Python molurus (Linnaeus)

Specimens examined (none).

Remarks. The Python is a well-known snake of south Nepal. It is found in forests near streams and large marshes. We have received reliable reports of this snake from west, central and east Nepal. Joseph Rheinart, anthropologist, spoke of seeing several during his research activity in the Surkhet region of west Nepal. On 20 November 1969 we talked with an elephant 'pundit' who had that morning run across two medium-sized (c. 10 feet) individuals in the forests of Chitwan. One snake was under some dead leaves; another partly concealed by grass. In February 1966 we saw 'tracks' of a large python in the sand of a Chitwan stream. The following reports are from east Nepal:

1. A small python, c. 8 feet long, was killed on the Tarhara Agricultural Station grounds, Morang Dist., in 1968.

2. A very large (c. 15 feet) individual was seen on the banks of the Bagjhora Jheel, Morang Dist., in 1968. When discovered by our informer, it had captured and partly swallowed a Chital (*Axis axis*) hind. Rushing back to the village a kilometre away, he recruited several men to help kill or capture the snake. Upon returning to the jheel, the men made so much commotion that the python regurgitated its meal and slipped into the water. Small pythons also live in this jheel.

COLUBRIDAE

Dendrelaphis tristis (Daudin)

Specimens examined (6). RUPANDEHI DIST.: Butwal, 300 m (4), 1969: 1020 mm, 830 mm, 790 mm, and 655 mm; CHITWAN DIST.: 50 km S. Narayanghat, 300 m (1), 15 Nov. 1969: 590 mm; MACKWANPUR DIST.: Hetaura 300 m (1), Oct. 1969: head and neck only.

Remarks. The Indian Bronzeback appears to be a fairly common snake of the Nepal lowlands. The specimens were found around human

dwelling located in forest ; they are the first records of this species from Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 140).

Boiga cyanea (Boulenger)

Specimens examined (1). MACKWANPUR DIST. : Anandaban, 15 km S. Kathmandu, 1525 m (1), 15 Feb. 1970 : 880 mm.

Coloration and Scallation. Uniform ferruginous above ; light cream below darkening to pale orange-cream posteriorly. Temporal scales are 2 + 2, not 2 + 3 as listed by Smith (1943 : 355).

Remarks. This snake was caught in semi-open Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) forest ; it is the first record for Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 140).

Boiga forsteni (Günther)

Specimens examined (1). RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 210 m (1), 1969 : length c. 1690 mm. A heavy specimen.

Coloration. Fairly typically marked with brown above interrupted with black crossbars. The lower head and neck is creamy yellow with the rest of the ventral surface light brown covered with irregular, small dark markings.

Remarks. This is the first record of the Forsten's Cat Snake from Nepal.

Boiga trigonata (Schneider)

Specimens examined (5). RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 210 m (4), 1969 : length 880 mm, 805 mm, 785 mm, and 435 mm ; MACKWANPUR DIST. : Hetaura, 300 m (1), Oct. 1969 : head and neck only.

Scallation. The third to fifth supralabials touch the eye as opposed to fourth to sixth as mentioned by Smith (1943 : 345).

Remarks. This Cat Snake is apparently fairly common in the central Nepal lowlands. They were caught near houses. These are the first specimens from the Terai and Duns of Nepal. Previously they have been seen in the hills around Kathmandu and Gurkha.

Elaphe helena (Daudin)

Specimens examined (2). MACKWANPUR DIST. : Hetaura, 300 m (1), 1968 ; PALPA DIST. : Tansen, 1525 m (1), May 1969 : length c. 760 mm.

Remarks. The Trinket Snake does not appear to be common in Nepal. It is found, though, from the Duns up to at least 5000 feet in the Pahar (Middle Hills). This is the first record of this species from Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 140).

Elaphe hodgsoni (Günther)

Specimens examined (5). KATHMANDU VALLEY, 1370 m (2), 1968 : 365 mm and 285 mm ; MACKWANPUR DIST. : Anandaban, 15 km S. Kathmandu, 1525 m (2), 10 Jan. 1969 : 370 mm, 27 May 1970 : 1310 mm. RASUWA DIST. : Thangbajet, 1525 m (1), 20 April 1968 : 335 mm.

Coloration and Scalation. Typical grey with two faint brown dorso-lateral stripes over the grey scales becoming most distinct towards the posterior half of the body. No presubocular in any of the five specimens examined.

Remarks. All our specimens of Hodgson's Racer come from about the 5000 feet altitude level ; all are from the Central Pahar (Middle Hills). Earlier collections of this snake were without accurate locality and altitude data.

Two specimens are in the Anand Kuti Science College collections, Kathmandu.

Enhydris enhydris (Schneider)

Specimens examined (1). DHANUSA DIST. : Janakpur, 100 m (1), 27 July 1969 : length c. 665 mm.

Remarks. This snake is reported to be common in freshwater ponds and small streams of the Janakpur area. The local name is 'Mach giddi'. This is the first specimen of this species from Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 140).

Enhydris sieboldi (Schlegel)

Specimens examined (1). CHITWAN DIST. : 50 km S. Narayanghat, 300 m (1), Oct. 1969 : length 360 mm.

Coloration. Dark brown above with mostly incomplete cream-coloured rings on the dorsal aspect. Below blackish with white spots.

Remarks. This snake was found along the edge of the Rapti River and was not thought to be common in that area. This is the first record of this freshwater snake from Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 140).

Lycodon aulicus (Linnaeus)

Specimens examined (10). KATHMANDU VALLEY, 1370 m (7) ; SINDHU DIST. : Sinduliphichowk, 1525 m (1) ; RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 270 m (2).

Remarks. The Common Wolf Snake is one of the most conspicuous snakes in Nepal for they are often caught in houses. This non-poisonous species is often mistaken for the Common Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*) for both are cross-banded. The wolf snakes we have seen, though, have yellow bands whereas the Kraits have nearly white bands. Of eight 'Kraits' sent to us from Duncan Hospital, Raxaul (located 0.5 km from

the Nepal border opposite Birganj), seven were Wolf Snakes ; only one was a Common Krait. Our specimens are the first reported from the Nepal lowlands.

Amphiesma himalayana (Günther)

Specimens examined (1). ILAM DIST. : Jamuna, 1830 m (1), 21 April 1970 : length c. 920 mm.

Coloration. The interstitial skin towards the anterior third of the body was an attractive bright orange ; it was especially noticeable when the snake was excited.

Remarks. Our specimen was caught in a cultivated area of terraced rice fields, hedgerows and small paths. This species has been reported once from Nepal (but without exact locality data) ; this is the first record from the eastern part of the country.

Xenochrophis piscator (Schneider)

Specimens examined (4). MORANG DIST. : Biratnagar, 100 m (3), 11 Nov. 1968 : length 690 mm, weight 105 gm, 14 Nov. 1968 : 950 mm and weight 212 gm, Nov. 1968 : length 845 mm : BARA DIST. : 5 m S. Simra, 120 m (1), Sept. 1969 : length 705 mm.

Coloration. The specimen from S. Simra was considerably different from the others examined. This individual was a uniform dark brown on the dorsal aspect with a bright deep yellow on the ventral surface. This yellow extends up to scale row three. A dark, almost black line, occurs on scales lines three and four.

Remarks. The Checkered Keelback is common in south Nepal. Our specimens were caught near water. Some people in Morang District told us that this snake was non-poisonous for man, but very dangerous for cows. Previous collections of this snake are all from the Central Pahar (hills). These are the first records from the Terai of central and eastern Nepal.

Amphiesma platyceps (Blyth)

Specimens examined (5). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Godaveri, 1830 m (1), 5 May 1970 : 600 mm ; MACKWANPUR DIST. : Anandaban, 15 km S. Kathmandu, 1525 m (1) ; RASUWA DIST. : Syabrubesi, 1525 m (1), 22 Oct. 1969 : length 770 mm ; ILAM DIST. : Hake Tham (Jamuna), 2135 m (2), 22 April 1970 : 650+ (tail broken) mm, 11 May 1970 : 715 mm and weight 45 gm.

Coloration. Four specimens are quite uniform and very similar : brown above, cream bordered with a creamy-orange below. The Syabrubesi specimen, however, is liberally marked with dark brown and hardly appears to be the same species as the others.

Remarks. This Keelback is apparently widely distributed in the hills of Nepal. Our specimens were caught in or near cultivations and human habitations. This species has not been reported previously from east Nepal (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 114).

Amphiesma stolata (Linnaeus)

Specimens examined (26). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Kupendol (2), Anand Kuti College collection (2), Tribhuvan University collection (6), Shanta Bhawan Gate (3), Patan Gate (1) ; KABHRE DIST. : Sanku-Reli, 1220 m (1) ; RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 300 m (3) ; BARA DIST. : Simra Airport, 150 m (1), Pownaipur, 100 m (1) ; DHANUSA DIST. : Janakpur 100 m (1) ; JHAPA DIST. : Gailadhuba, 100 m (1) ; ILAM DIST. : Ilam, 1300 m (1), Jamuna, 1525 m (2) ; CHITWAN DIST. : 50 km S. Narayanghat, 300 m (1).

Coloration. Several specimens had (in life) a most conspicuous and attractive yellow on the upper labials, lower jaw and extending down the first two centimetres of the neck.

Measurements. Our longest specimen measured 550 mm ; a specimen 525 mm long weighed 27 gm ; another 505 mm weighed 21 gm.

Remarks. The Striped Keelback is undoubtedly the most common, or at least the most conspicuous, snake in Nepal. It is found commonly in Kathmandu in grassy areas near cultivation. Our specimens from the Terai were caught fairly close to water ; none were in forest regions. Strangely enough, this snake has been reported previously only from the Kathmandu area (see Swan & Leviton 1962 : 114). The Nepali name of this snake is ' Harhara '.

Oligodon erythrogaster Boulenger

Specimens examined (2). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Godaveri, 1525 m (1), 2nd Aug. 1969 : length 555 mm, weight 97 gm ; MACKWANPUR DIST. : Anandaban, 15 km S. Kathmandu, 1525 m (1).

Coloration and Scalation. Markings and scale counts differ somewhat from those published by Smith (1943 : 196 and 232) for this species. The body scales are in 15 rows (vs. 17 for previously known specimens). There are 188 body scales ; 49 caudal scales. The arrangement of the head scales is that given by Smith. The base colour of the snake (taken from the live specimen) is grey or brownish-grey. There is a distinct vertebral stripe, 2 scales wide, running from the neck to the vent region where it changes to 1 scale wide on the tail. This stripe encompasses the vertebral scales and $\frac{1}{2}$ of each adjoining scale row. This vertebral stripe is bordered by a dark maroon stripe covering exactly one scale row in width but occupying $\frac{1}{2}$ of one scale row and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the adjoining row. This stripe is darkened with a black border. A black stripe with a maroon tinge covers $\frac{1}{2}$ scale row 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ scale row 3. Another distinctive black

stripe, $\frac{1}{2}$ scale wide covers $\frac{1}{4}$ scale row 4 and $\frac{1}{4}$ scale row 5. All except the vertebral stripe originate at the neck and remain uniformly wide to the vent and are not found on the tail. Ventrally, the snake is greyish maroon. The maroon of each ventral scale is edged with a distinctive white dot on the caudal half of the scale while the anterior part is black. Towards the lateral edge the ventral scales are concolorous with the grey of scale row 1. The tail is a lighter maroon than the body and from directly below the tail looks uniformly maroon with white dots on the edges just showing. The ventral caudal scales curve around the body so that the black lateral edges of these scales join to form a continuous stripe down either side. Dorsally, an orange-brown line, reduced to 1 scale in width, runs the entire length of the tail while the dark maroon stripes are reduced to $\frac{1}{2}$ scale in width. The tail ends in a sharp point which pushed into the hand when the snake was handled.

Remarks. This snake appears to be uncommon. The Godaveri specimen was caught on a cloudy day in leaf litter within dense subtropical forest.

Pseudoxenodon macrops (Blyth)

Specimens examined (1). ILAM DIST. : Hake Tham (Jamuna), 2225 m (1), 22 April 1970 ; length 810 mm.

Remarks. This snake was caught in dense forest as it moved along the forest floor through very damp moss, ferns and leaf litter. A severed hand of a tree frog was recovered from the GI tract. This snake has been reported once before—from the same valley system (Mai Khola) as our specimen.

Ptyas mucosus (Linnaeus)

Specimens examined (8). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Anand Kuti Science College collection (2), Tribhuvan University collection (2), Chobar Gorge (1) ; RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 300 m (2) ; BARA DIST. : Pawanipur (1).

Remarks. Outside of the Striped Keelback, the Dhaman or Rat Snake is perhaps the most conspicuous snake in Nepal. In Kathmandu Valley they are often found around and sometimes in houses. The specimen from Chobar Gorge was curled up in the sunshine while resting on a cow dung patty. A friend was amazed recently at seeing a large snake swimming up through the Chobar Gorge, making good progress against the swift current of the Bagmati. This was likely a Rat Snake. The large individuals of Kathmandu are grey ; we have yet to see a black one. A large Rat Snake near our house in Kupendol was watched while it slowly swallowed a very large toad.

Sibynophis collaris (Gray)

Specimens examined (1). MACKWANPUR DIST. : Anandaban 15 km S. Kathmandu, 1525 m (1), May 1968 : length c. 485 mm.

Remarks. This is apparently a rare snake in Central Nepal. This species has been listed from Nepal but without previous locality or altitude data (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 115).

Trachischium tenuiceps (Blyth)

Specimens examined (1). NAWAKOT DIST. : 3 km S. Palung, 2000 m (1), 20 Sept. 1969 : length 410 mm.

Remarks. This snake was found on the Tribhuvan Rajpath in an area of rocks and loose soil. In Nepal this species is known only from the Mahabharat Range.

Elachistodon westermanni Rheinhardt

Specimens examined (none). In Nov. 1964 a specimen was caught in Chitwan Dist., 50 km S. Narayanghat, 300 m, and sent to the Field Museum, Chicago, where it was identified by Dr. Robert F. Inger.

Remarks. This Indian Egg-Eater Snake was caught on a footpath at the edge of heavy forest and a hundred yards from the Rapti River. It was moving at dusk. This rare snake has not been reported before from Nepal (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 141) and only a few specimens are known.

ELAPIDAE

Bungarus caeruleus (Schneider)

Specimens examined (6). RUPANDEHI DIST. : Butwal, 300 m (3) ; MACKWANPUR DIST. : 3 km S. of the Churia Pass, S. Hetaura, 400 m (1) ; MORANG DIST. : Biratnagar Town, 100 m (1) ; NEPAL : Locality uncertain (a specimen in Peace Corps Office presumably from BARA DIST. : Pawanipur).

Our largest specimen was 1219 mm (4 feet) long and weighed 540 gm ; 14 Nov. 1968.

Remarks. The Common Krait, though not previously reported from Nepal (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 141), is a fairly frequent snake of the lowlands. The Mackwanpur snake was found some distance up into the Churia Hills and not close to water. The Biratnagar specimen was crossing the road right at the edge of Biratnagar town at about 10.00 p.m. The road here was flanked on both sides by standing water.

Bungarus fasciatus (Schneider)

Specimens examined (1). MORANG DIST. : 1 km S. Ithari, 120 m (1), 12 Nov. 1968 : length 1232 mm (4' $\frac{1}{2}$ ").

Remarks. The Banded Krait, not reported from Nepal before (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 141), does not appear to be common here. Our

specimen was found early one morning on the Dharan Road where it had been killed trying to cross. On both sides of the road at this point were pools of water. People here recognized the snake but said it was not common.

Calliophis maclellandi (Rheinhardt)

Specimens examined (1). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Swyambu Hill, 1300 m (1), Sept. 1968 : length 482 mm.

Coloration. Dorsally this snake is uniformly light brown with an indistinct vertebral row of black dots ; the head is black with a wide transverse, cream-coloured bar.

Remarks. The Coral Snake has been reported from Nepal but without exact locality data. This very poisonous snake is not common in Nepal and so far our only specimens are from the Kathmandu Valley. Besides the one specimen reported on here we have seen individuals caught on Toka Hill and in the Rabi Bhawan Compound, Kali Mati. The specimen given here is well preserved and displayed in the collection of the Anand Kuti Science College, Kathmandu.

Naja naja (Linnaeus)

Specimens examined (1). MORANG DIST. : Biratnagar Town, 300 m (1), Oct. 1969 : length 615 mm.

Remarks. Although the Common Cobra is frequently seen in lowland Nepal, it has not been reported previously from this country (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 142). The Common Cobra occurs in the Terai and Bhabar, but is apparently less common in the low hills and Duns. Our specimen was caught by Mr. Das, DFO, in the Forest Department Compound situated in the center of Biratnagar Town. Cobras are thought to be fairly common here. We also heard they are common around Dharan where the Town Panchyat has received several hundred individuals after offering bounties. In March 1969 we saw a large, light tan Cobra at the edge of cultivations along the Kosi Embankment Road, Sunsari Dist., but could not secure the specimen.

It is also possible that some Cobras were introduced into the Kathmandu Valley early in the 1900's by a Rana Prime Minister. Rumors persist that Cobras occur at Balaju but these are unsubstantiated.

Ophiophagus hannah (Cantor)

Specimens examined (2). CHITWAN DIST. : 18 km W. Hetaura, 300 m (1), Sept. 1960 ; RAUTAHAT DIST. : 3 km N. Mahendra Rajmarg, c. 30 km E. Simra-Amleckganj Rd., 200 m (1), Oct. 1969. Both were approximately 3 m long.

Coloration. Both snakes were very dark brown without yellow chevron markings. The head and foreneck of the Chitwan specimen is now in the collections of the Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay.

Remarks. The King Cobra is not a common snake of Nepal. The Chitwan individual was in tall grass at the edge of forest. It hid under a large log when approached. The Rautahat snake was in dense Sal forest and came towards a jeep in which hunters were riding, whereupon it was shot. This Cobra is a forest snake here in Nepal but is not necessarily found in the hills. The Rautahat Cobra was in Bhabar forest some 10 km from the Churia foothills.

TYPHLOPIDAE

Typhlops braminus (Daudin)

Specimens examined (4). KATHMANDU VALLEY: American Club, Kali Mati (2), TU collection (1), Anand Kuti collection (1).

Remarks. The Common Blind Snake, although fairly common in Kathmandu, has not been reported before from Nepal (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 142). Other specimens have been caught and sent to the Bombay Natural History Society and to The Field Museum, Chicago.

VIPERIDAE

Trimeresurus albolabris Gray

Specimens examined (2). KATHMANDU VALLEY: TU Collection (1); CHITWAN DIST.: 50 km S. Narayanghat, 300 m (1).

Remarks. This Green Pit Viper is not common in Nepal. All previous specimens taken here are from the hills (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 116) but this range should be extended to include at least the lowlands of the Chitwan Dun. Our Chitwan Viper was caught near the edge of a dense heterogenous forest of Sal and other broad-leaved species.

Trimeresurus monticola Günther

Specimens examined (4). KATHMANDU VALLEY: Swyambu Hill (1), Patan Gate (1), Patan City (1); ILAM DIST.: Hake Tham (Jamuna), 2250 m (1), 15 May 1970; weight 68 gm, length 472 mm.

Coloration. These snakes are typically brown with dark brown mottling.

Remarks. The Mountain Pit Viper is the most common poisonous snake in the hills of Nepal. We have seen several individuals from the Kathmandu Valley besides those listed here. These vipers are found in yards and sometimes within houses of Kathmandu. The Patan Gate specimen had grey hair (presumably rat) in the GI tract. All previous records of this species are from central Nepal (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 116), thus our individual from far east Nepal is of interest. Our Hake Tham snake was resting in dense forest under a covering of wet moss and leaves when its head was accidently touched while we were

searching for a rare bird's nest. The sluggish snake did not attempt to bite until greatly disturbed.

Trimeresurus stejnegeri Schmidt

Specimens examined (2). KATHMANDU VALLEY : Anand Kuti collection, reportedly from Swyambu Hill (1) ; SINDHU DIST. : Malemchigoan, 2470 m (1).

Coloration and Scalation. Our specimen from Malemchi differs somewhat from the description given by Smith (1943 : 517-518). Our snake has 8 supralabials (as opposed to 9-10, Smith 1943 : 517). Otherwise it is similar to typical *stejnegeri* in that the first labial is completely divided from the nostril ; there are 21 scale rows at mid body ; most of the scales are distinctly keeled ; the temporal scales are smooth ; the right supraocular is divided by a transverse suture, the left only partly so.

The snake is greenish-bluegrey on the dorsal aspect with irregular ferruginous markings on the head and body. These blotches involve single scales on the body, but combine several scales on the head so that irregular lines occur. These brown markings appear to be somewhat similar to those of *T. gramineus* of S. India. There is a pale whitish line of scale row 1 which is not bordered by orange or chocolate (as described for typical *stejnegeri*).

Remarks. Specimens previously collected in Nepal have been from about 4000 feet altitude (*see* Swan & Leviton 1962 : 116). Our Malemchi snake is from c. 8100 feet. It was caught on a grassy slope.

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